Duke University
JUN 26 1947
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THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Vol. IX—No. 5 LEHIGH UNIVERSITY — BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA May, 1947

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Bureau Suggests Candidates

Attention of administrators who wish to strengthen their Departments at the upper levels is invited to the following list of selected candidates:

1. Woman, Chairman of Dept., Comp. Lit. and Humanities, Phi Beta Kappa.

2. Man, Chairman of Dept., Ph.D. Yale, Chaucer, 17th Century, Creative Writing.

3. Man, Head of Department Junior College, Ph.D. Iowa, Phi Beta Kappa, Novel, Shakespeare, 19th Century.

4. Man, Chairman of Department in Large State Univ., wishes full profesorship without administrative responsibility, 18th century.

5. Man, Ph.D. Princeton, Guggenheim Fellow, Romantic, American.

6. Man, Chairman Department Small Liberal Arts College, Ph.D. Chicago, Chaucer, 19th Century.

7. Man, Ph.D. Yale, wide experience, author, American Lit.

8. Man, Ph.D. Columbia, long experience, author, Drama, Elizabethan, Novel.

9. Man, Ph.D. Harvard, Comp. Lit., Old and Middle English, Guggenheim Fellow.

10. Man, Ph.D. Cornell, editor, English and American Language and Literature.

Middle Atlantic Officers

At its meeting in Baltimore on May 10, the Middle Atlantic Section of the College English Association elected the following officers: President, Raymond D. Havens, Johns Hopkins University; Vice-President, Elizabeth Nitchie, Goucher College; Secretary-Treasurer, Thomas F. Marshall, Western Maryland College.

Ph.D. Reform — A Proposal

In the second issue of *The Journal of General Education* coming from the liberal arts college of the University of Iowa, is an article by Norman Foerster, a former president of the CEA, on the topic "The Teacher of Great Literature."

Mr. Foerster is opposed to a "teaching degree" on the ground that the problem of preparation for teaching would be automatically solved by a more truly thorough preparation for scholarship. Elsewhere in the article he offers concrete suggestions as to how room could be found for the innovations proposed in the section reprinted below. — *Editor.*

What can be done in the graduate school to provide better scholars and teachers? The graduate school cannot afford to wait till the high schools and colleges have supplied it with students who have had a liberal college education. The need is immediate: the new college curricula are in operation, college classes are waiting for appropriate instructors, college administrators are looking for men and women who can do the kind of teaching required. The graduate school will have to set about doing what it can. What, in the field English can it do? As a minimum, it can:

1. Prescribe enough Greek to give the instructor a background of knowledge and self-respect when he teaches the Greek masterpieces. Not only is Greek literature of the highest value to the English specialist; it is also the one foreign literature certain to be represented in any list of great books to be used in general education. Twelve semester hours of Homeric Greek will take the graduate through some of the *Iliad* and much of the *Odyssey* — in all about fourteen books. In case this has been anticipated in college, the student is ready for twelve hours of Attic Greek, enough to take him into Plato and Euripides (he can dispense with the traditional *Anabasis*).

2. See to it that the student can

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The Curse of the Profession . . . .

(Read before the CEA meeting in Baltimore, May 10, 1947.)

. . . I think the only really good advice that one can give to a bright, normal undergraduate who has his heart set on graduate studies in English is that he first search his soul and then calculate his chances on inheriting or marrying money. If he is not called to teaching, or if his chances of acquiring an income from outside sources are slim, he should reflect again before giving up to this mad whim . . . .

I am incurably optimistic about undergraduate training in English, as I am about higher education. It seems to me that the programs for freshmen and sophomores and the advanced courses for juniors and seniors are definitely improvements on the programs and courses offered twenty years ago, or, from what I have heard and read of them, forty years ago or sixty years ago. My only real fears relate to the pressures that result at present in our teaching thirty to thirty-five freshmen in composition classes and paying instructors less than respectable boards of education now pay teachers in the public schools. I am not speaking of instructors in medicine and agriculture.

And now for the graduate schools. The subject is such a large and enticing one that I hardly know where to begin . . . . Let me admit, first of all, that I have a high resistance to articles on how to improve our instruction in English in the graduate schools or in the undergraduate schools, and I shall not blame you in the least if you display equally high resistance to any suggestions that I may hint at.

But let me digress to give you one of my reasons for displaying a notable lack of rapturous excitement when my eye falls on an essay entitled "How We Rejuvenated English A" or "Great Books Melt Little Minds and Produce Millenium." Some years ago I made a rough survey of trends in sophomore English. Among the chores, I read every essay devoted to sophomore English that appeared during a ten year period in one of our professional journals. As I now remember it, I read approximately fifty essays. Two of them defended the survey of English literature. The rest attacked the survey and presented discussions of courses designed to revolutionize the work of the sophomore year. The only feature that the forty-eight essays had in common was their assurance that the courses they described were completely satisfactory, although some of them had been in operation for less than a year at the time that the essays were written in their praise.

Please do not understand this reminiscence as a defense of the status quo or the status ante quo. I tell the story simply to help explain my skepticism when I read, or refuse to read, papers on new teaching methods and new programs at any level. And despite my faith that our graduate work is more sensible now than it has been in the past, I am completely out of sympathy with advocates of new systems who think (a) that we should make our graduate schools over into schools in educational methods, or (b) that we should eliminate bibliography or literary history or some other useful branch of graduate study in favor of some other equally useful branch. (I must say, however, that my attitude towards bibliographical and textual studies is somewhat like that of the reactionary Southerner towards Negroes: they are all right in their place.)

Of course, I have complaints to make about the training that graduate students receive. Everyone has. My chief complaints are two in number. Both are directed as much at the professors as at the students, and after stating the first I am almost self-enjoined from stating the second. My first complaint is that we teachers of English have, as a group, a nauseous tendency towards masochism which I have not noted among teachers of physics, chemistry, or history. Our favorite sport at meetings such as this seems to be the delivery of diatribes retailing the dreadful facts about our freshmen.

(Continued on page 3)

THE NEWS LETTER

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Published Nine Times a Year at
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Tie-In Sale

Dear Editor:

Colleges have changed from specialty shops to department stores, but English teachers don't seem to know it. They lament that the old goods won't sell, that the old sales methods are a flop. They find the customers "ill-prepared," "uninterested," "job-minded," "science-minded," "seduced by the social sciences." Priding themselves on being islands of culture in the Philistine Sea, they put more and more energy into teaching grammar and the elementary decencies of rhetoric to more and more students who are more and more uninterested.

For the mass market, English departments have devised a varied assortment of general literary courses: Introductions to Literature, Surveys of English or American Literature, Types Courses, Courses in Cultural Landmarks, particularly American, Courses in Great Books, Courses in Mixed Readings with an Omnibus Volume or a series of cheap reprints. One or another of these courses is generally required of all or most students, who accept them with resignation as part of a tie-in sale. They have to "take" so much English to get a degree.

In planning these courses, teachers give much attention to what students "should have read," on the theory that if they don't read it in college they never will. Frequently introduced with a burst of enthusiastic publicity, these offerings soon become routine merchandise, and before long are replaced by others which a group of departmental Young Turks feels will certainly bring in the business. But the customers notice little change. They continue to read because they have assignments, to study because they will be examined, to question the value received. In such a market, the merchant's position is not strong.

Unless the English department can offer goods which its customers find valuable without pressure or super-salesmanship, unless the general courses provide a rich, stimulating, satisfying experience, the department cannot long prosper, even behind a protective tariff, and even through its Fabian dialectic in defence of its wares be eloquent. It no longer caters to the carriage trade, and the competition is fierce.

Unduly yours,
Arthur S. Long
Mercator University

An Author Pleads For Her Characters

Dear Editor:

Your letter gives an opportunity that is too enticing for a writer to resist.

I have taught literature myself and know something of the difficulties from the point of view of the teacher. At the same time I remember how sterile my classes in literature were for me as a student. There never was a hungrier student mind that mine and literature was my meat. Yet never in any literature class did I find that which could feed me. I fed myself out of hours, devouring books of my own choice.

I don't believe students are ever going to enjoy literature or understand what it is about until they are led straight to the material of literature, namely, the human beings in books. It is not the authors who are interesting—or ought not to be. I am dismayed at the number of letters I get these days from students, all beginning in much the same words. "I have an assignment in English about you—" My blood freezes—have I in my turn become an assignment in English? Oh, poor children! Why should they have to inquire into the details of my life and learn the facts of my personal history and how I happened to write my books? This has nothing to do with literature or with them. It shows, it seems to me, a completely wrong approach to the study of literature.

What I should like is not to be "assigned" at all, nor taught at all in English classes. I'd much rather have my books read for other reasons. But if any is taught, I should like to have the teacher introduce it not as literature—doubtful, anyway—nor even as a book, but primarily as a group of people. Let him say, when he approaches a book, here is a handful of individuals, strangers and that they happen to be between the covers of a book is nothing. They might be in a room, or on a street, or in a town. Who are they, and what are they, and why do they behave as they do? Let us find out all about them.

In other words, I wish that students could approach novels only through the people in them. That is what a novel is, people and their relation to each other. When the student realizes this, the people come alive for him and he studies them—that is, he comes to know them, not the author or his tricks of style and form.

You will ask are they not to study style and form? Only through the people, I think. The students may discover the style and see if it clarifies or clouds the personalities of the people, and whether the scheme of the novel is suitable to the full revelation of the people and what they do. But I am sure that unless and until teachers and students will take literature as primarily a picture of life itself, portrayed through persons, the study of literature will remain what it is, a formal, cold "assignment."

I feel strongly in this, for I have never been able to regain my own love of Shakespeare, lost through the drilling of an English master who made me thoroughly familiar with the technique and words of Shakespeare's plays and killed Shakespeare's people for me. Life is the essential to be pursued in literature. If literature is not taught as life it is useless to the student and literature itself is killed by so much.

For I need not point out how important it is to the writer that his work be appreciaed for itself. Not to have understanding and appreciation of his work is to him what a singer would feel if he were singing to an audience of the deaf. It is the song that matters to the singer, not himself. When ears are deaf why should he sing to them?

Yours very sincerely,
Pearl S. Buck

Reprinted from **The News Letter** of April, 1941, Vol. III, No. 4.

The Curse . . .

(Continued from page 1)

cy, lack of purpose, and general muddleheadedness. As our diatribes usually have to do with teaching methods and curricula, I feel free, despite my dislike for intellectual masochim, to level my second charge.

My second charge is one that I myself, feel keenly. It is, bluntly that we are ignorant. I suppose that our ignorance is no deeper nor more damaging than that of other men, in and out of teaching but the truth is that we, as scholarly bearers of humanistic tradition, are supposed to be learned and wise, and my impression is that we are frequently neither. Part of our ignorance is the normal, stubborn, human ignorance which may not easily be overcome short of many years of hard study. It seems to me, however, that part of it is also to be attributed to the improper training of our graduate students.

Let me illustrate my assertion that we are ignorant and that our training could be improved. First let me outline the graduate courses into which a student was directed a few years ago. I was the student and I take my career to have been a typical one. I was primarily interested in American literature and wrote a dissertation which involved having or acquiring at least a superficial knowledge of French and German literatures and American history. Working in two different universities, I accumulated, as I remember them, twenty-five semester hours of credits in Eng-

(Continued on page 3)

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The Curse . . .

(Continued from page 2)

lish language and literature before 1500, approximately fifty semester hours in English literature between 1500 and 1800, and twelve hours in English and American literatures between 1800 and the present. I took no course in history, no course in French, Italian, or German literature, no course in political theory, social theory, the history of science or religion, aesthetics, or general philosophy. I ended my graduate career a very ignorant fellow with a Ph.D. degree, and I am still suffering for it.

One balm relieves a little of the sting that goes with my ignorance. I find that a great many of my professional friends and acquaintances are in the same boat, whether they know it or not. Let me illustrate again. A high school principal with degrees after his name has told me that graduates of his institution are well prepared for college. They all must memorize the eighteen rules for the comma before they are permitted to graduate. I know a respected scholar who insisted a few years ago that **Anthony Adverse** was the great American novel. It seemed to me then and now that this judgment indicated a failure of two sorts: the professor evidently did not know enough about American novels to speak; and he demonstrated a radical failure in critical judgment. I have talked recently with professors of English who have never read any one of the following: the **Oresteia, War and Peace, Faust, The Wealth of Nations,** the **Social Contract, The Theory of the Leisure Class,** Mr. Lovejoy's **The Great Chain of Being,** and Mr. Whitehead's **Science and the Modern World.** I know a professor who some years ago, had never read a poem by T. S. Eliot or William Butler Yeats or a serious twentieth-century novel. His explanation was that he left that sort of thing to his wife. I know an excellent scholar who once said to me, "I hear them talk about transcendentalism on these oral examinations. I don't really want to know anything much about it; it's out of my field; but tell me in a word, just what is transcendentalism?"

This brings me to what should be the point of my paper. We sometimes boast that a great work of art is an imaginative synthesis; sometimes we speak, like Wordsworth, of poetic truth; sometimes we refer to absolute experience. But I do not believe with Plato that the rhetorician is, like the poet, inspired by a god. I believe that the exegesis of a synthesis requires analysis, and I believe that the unraveling of absolute experience necessitates knowledge of phenomenal experience. We need in our profession men who are both specialists and paragons of humane learning, who are both scholarly and wise. How are we to produce and hold such men? I do not know. I have no panacea to offer. I am afraid that I do not have even a palliative. As I said at the beginning of this paper, I believe that we are giving students better training than they received twenty years ago. I believe that their training is broader and richer. But life is short, the craft hard to learn.

We cannot omit much of what we now demand of our candidates for the doctorate. Perhaps we can pare the requirements in linguistics a little, the number of courses in literary history by a few hours. To a mathematician, comparatively little in our course of study would seem to be of a high level of abstraction or more than a repetition of new examples of the same kind of experience. But knowledge of the language is probably the nearest thing to a professional secret that we have, and perhaps we need that if only to make our jobs secure. What substitutions we could make for omitted studies should, I thing, go to rounding out the student's general knowledge and sharpening his critical faculties.

Although I sometimes thank God for the power of inertia when I read of suggestions for curriculum changes, I think that we could do with more intellectual history, aesthetics, history of religion, politics, and science. I think that the program in American civilization based more on a horizontal than a vertical dissection of knowledge is a worthy experiment in which we are led by that great radical institution, Harvard University. In fact, I am willing to subscribe to the investigation of anything that looks like an answer to Goethe's call for more light.

For the curse of our trade is not that we are too far separated from the schools of education and their prepossession with methodology. The curse of our profession is ignorance.

Guy A. Cardwell
Univ. of Maryland

Bureau Needs Registrants

Within the past month, the Appointment Bureau has been asked to recommend registrants for openings such as these:

1. Assoc. Professor, Am. Lit., Freshman Comp. $4500.
2. Asst. Professor, Teachers College, $3900
3. Head Dept., Small Church College, $3400.
4. Four men, A & M College, $3000.
5. Young Ph.D., Teachers College, $3420.
6. Instructor, English and Journalism, Small College, $3240.
7. Instructors, M.A.'s or above, 12 hour load, $3000 up.
8. Chairman, English and Speech, Teachers College, $5000 up.

To attract administrators, the Bureau must have registrants in all ranks and to be most useful to members, the Bureau must attract as many administrators as possible. Registrations are solicited.

I've Been Reading

Members are invited to contribute reviews of books, old or new, which they wish to call to the attention of other English teachers. Professor J. Gordon Esker, the Assistant Editor, in charge of I'VE BEEN READING. He is Head, Department of English, Jersey City Junior College, Jersey City, N. J.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PLAYWRITING, by Samuel Selden. 120 pp.; 2.00. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., Inc., 1946

Probably everyone working in the tributary or the professional theatre knows Samuel Selden as collaborator in the two field-classics, MODERN THEATRE PRACTICE and STAGE SCENERY AND LIGHTING. Now Professor Selden, eminent director of the Carolina Playmakers, has published "solo" a long-needed manual, AN INTRODUCTION TO PLAYWRITING which he describes as "a primer . . . to help clear ground, and then to provide a series of simple checks for the first efforts of the beginning playwright."

For a "primer," this little book has astonishing range. It guides the beginner in finding true dramatic material and selecting the right people for his characters. After warning that "there is no short-cut to play-making that anyone has yet been able to discover," and that writing for the theatre demands a strong constitution ready to rewrite, not once, but many times, it outlines the five structural elements of a play. A highly original formula is provided for testing the ultimate quality and reality of the play.

The beginner is cautioned against two common pitfalls: that of offending the conventional beliefs of "the people in his country at his time;" and that of employing the increasingly unpopular technique of doubleplotting, for, as the author explains, "Young playwrights dearly love the sub-plot." Again, the beginner is warned that, in writing for the theatre, he is merely a collaborator with the many persons who will give life to his play upon a stage, the actor, the scenic artist, the stage manager, and the audience.

The closing chapter analyzes why the spectator "looks with so much longing to the theatre." Here Professor Selden warns that every play must satisfy these four primary demands of every audience: **diversion, stimulation, illumination, sensation.** This chapter is followed by a set of "warming-up ex-

(Continued on page 4)

BOOK NOTE

The Practice Of Exposition

By Joseph M. Bachelor and Harold L. Haley

HERE is a stimulating new textbook that presents sound practical instruction in expository writing. Intended for freshman English courses, the book stresses those forms which will be of most use to all students. The book concentrates on eight types of exposition, beginning with the basic forms and progressing to more complex patterns. It includes 49 illustrative models of varied length and theme.

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I've Been Reading . . .

(Continued from page 3)

ercises" and some sample pages from O'Neill's ANNA CHRISTIE.

Julia Hevey Walsh
Jersey City Junior College

ENGLISH LITERATURE IN FACT & STORY, by George F. Reynolds, D. Appleton-Century Company, New York, 1946.

The revised edition of this little book, long famous, should do more to make English literature really interesting, to the beginner as well as to the seasoned scholar, than any book I can think of. As a history of literature, it contains readable sketches of all the authors down to the present, and through the unusual photographs, it gives the feeling and atmosphere of England down through the centuries. The appendices on English churches, monastic life, forms of worship, chivalry, the English family, English educational institutions, English sports, and the Englsh stage are valuable and useful.

J. G. E.

PREFACE TO CRITICAL READING, by Richard D. Altick, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1946, $1.60.

Teachers whose students do not know how to begin to read critically may get help from this detailed analysis of the methods of expression. Examples of connotation in advertising, politics, and literature, are followed by classifications of diction: jargon, technical language, clichés, and newspaperese. The section on logic should help students to think straight. The last chapter, "On Reading Newspapers," suggests that newspapers aim rather to conceal than to reveal the truth, but some might disagree here.

J. G. E.

Book Collection

The American Library Association announces plans for a revised edition of its **Basic Book Collection for High Schools.** The new list, is being compiled by a Joint Advisory Committee of the A.L.A., the National Education Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English.

Miss Dorotha Dawson, Supervisor, Department of School Libraries, Board of Education, Detroit, Mich., is chairman of the Committee.

Correction

Wilson O. Clough, author of "Teacher Load in Composition" in the April issue, is Chairman, Department of English at the University of Wyoming.

Ph.D. Reform . . .

(Continued from page 1)

read one modern language to advantage, by testing his familiarity with a work by Moliere or Racine, or Dante, or Cervantes, or Goethe. This will be a simple requirement as soon as the third-year course in modern language has been changed from the usual historical survey to a study of one or two great writers.

3. Provide a graduate course in the Bible suited to the needs of candidates in English and the other literatures. The proper text is the literary masterpiece known as the King James translation, though an increasing number of students might be expected to use the Greek New Testament also. The proper object is to study the Bible, not in any theological or sectarian way, nor merely with reference to the history of texts, but in a way calculated to give the sort of literary and cultural understanding needed alike by the literary scholar and the instructor in great literature. A wealth of commentaries, factual and interpretive, is ready to be drawn upon.

The foregoing requirement in Greek, modern language, and the Bible will make for some competence in the teaching of masterpieces in three fields. Three fields in addition to English and American literature are ample for any two-year course that does not attempt too much. To increase further the competence of the instructor the graduate school can:

4. Introduce into the training for higher degrees the subject of literary criticism, theoretical and practical. The conventional course in the history of literary criticism will not suffice. What the student needs is not more history but a completely different approach to literature, a direct confrontation of the problem of literary values, aesthetic and ethical. This should be undertaken in a course, if a suitable professor can be found, and have a significant place in virtually all other courses offered by the department. Reform in this direction will have to be gradual, since most English departments today are staffed almost exclusively by literary historians.

5. Provide for minor work in philosophy and fine arts. There is reason to hope that students will soon be entering the graduate school better equipped in these subjects. Either in college or in the graduate years literary students should be expected to acquire some familiarity with the masterpieces of philosophy (the "Great Thinkers" from Plato and Aristotle), to recognize the main types of systematic interpretation, and to develop an interest and some ability in speculation. Once this goal has been reached, the subject of fine arts should be similarly cultivated: certainly every candidate should have experience and knowledge in at least one of the arts other than literature.

If it is said that such work in philosophy and fine arts is general or liberal and not professional, the answer is that we shall have to think more generally and liberally, less technically, of professional training. Rightly conceived, the college uses specialized studies—in the A.B. "major"—to further and deepen general or liberal education, and the graduate school uses general or liberal education to increase the significance of specialized studies. It is absurd to think that the present A.B. graduate with the most liberal education available has had enough of it to become a satisfactory scholar or a professional liberal college teacher. The great books he is to teach cannot be adequately known without advanced liberal education, and whatever the professor needs to deepen his understanding is an appropriate part of his professional training.

Norman Foerster
Chapel Hill, N. C.

A Revivalist Revived

A revivalist who had fallen dead in the pulpit from too violent religious exercise was astonished to wake up in Hades. He promptly sent for the Adversary of Souls and demanded his freedom, explaining that he was entirely orthodox, and had always led a pious and holy life.

"That is all very true," said the Adversary, "but you taught by example that a verb should not agree with its subject in person and number, whereas the Good Book says that contention is worse than a dinner of herbs. You also tried to release the objective case from its thraldom to the preposition, and it is written that servants should obey their masters. You stay right here."

Ambrose Bierce,
Fantastic Fables.

Members are reminded of the publication early this year of *The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce*, by The Citadel Press, New York.

Writers Attention!

CRONOS, the new international quarterly review, announces itself as a new outlet for stories, poetry and articles on Literature, Philosophy, The Social Sciences and The Arts.

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Report from Indiana

The Indiana College English Association held its twelfth annual conference at Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana,, on May 2-3, 1947. The greater part of the program was devoted to a consideration of the present unhappy state of English studies and teaching in our colleges, and the honestly self-critical way in which the problem was attacked, both in papers and in discussion, made for an extremely interesting and even encouraging meeting.

The entire discussion centered on the student who does not plan to major in English and who is, in many cases, simply working off an academic requirement during his sojourn in the English Department. Two of the papers, with ensuing discussion, were concerned with attacking the problem through actual course offerings. A third approached it in a broader manner.

Dean John W. Ashton of Indiana University spoke on "Ends and Means in the General Course in Literature." He pointed out that such courses should be designed not to produce specialists, and that in planning them full attention must be paid to the general student's background, his capacity for understanding literature, and his general interest. The purpose of such a course should be to introduce the student to certain great pieces of literature, primarily those of our Western tradition, in order to indicate the qualities of that tradition and to develop in the student some feeling for the qualities of human nature and the problems of life revealed in those works. For the student in the general literature course this is more important than our admitted responsibility of introducing students to the esthetic aspects of literature, or our desire to impart any sense of the history of literature. Consequently, the works for such a course should be selected realistically, and not merely for their historical significance alone, or for their snob appeal. Finally, the works selected should be read entire, and not as snippets in an anthology.

The discussion following Dean Ashton's paper was led by Professor Fitzhugh of Lehigh University, who combined a plea for greater student appeal in such courses, to be derived by better-trained teachers and by discussions instead of lectures, with a bit of salesmanship for the CEA News Letter. Professor Martin S. Shockley of Evansville College also discussed the paper, and presented an account of the course in general literature at Evansville.

In his paper "English for the Non-English Student" Professor John B. Shackford of Ball State Teachers College presented another aspect of the problem. He proposed as the goal of our efforts the understanding and verbal expression of thought by the student, to be achieved by an orderly study of types of reading and writing. All temptations toward teaching social science, philosophy-of-life, or literature must be resisted. He proposed a two-year course, divided into four sections dealing with the four major types of composition: description, narrative, exposition and argument, with readings to be correlated to the type of writing. Final testing would be in the form of essay examinations, set by the department and graded by a departmental committee. After touching on remedial work Professor Shackford urged that further research and investigation be conducted into the type of English work carried on in the schools, as a means of determining more precisely the procedure which would be most effective in work at the college level.

Professor Raymond V. Pence of the University of Notre Dame started the discussion of the paper by suggesting that any program for the general student should take into account the current widespread interest in courses in communication. Mr. William Hugh Jansen of Indiana University questioned the practicability of requiring such a proportionately large amount of the student's time. He opposed courses involving total combination of literature and composition. In the lively and extended discussion which followed people were divided in their views. While some comments indicated that to many teachers the primary function of the average English Department is to impart certain skills to the freshmen and sophomores committed to its charge, others expressed the hope that we would not neglect the artistic qualities inherent in the study of English.

"Can the Study of Literature be Revived?" a paper delivered at the evening session by Professor Marvin T. Herrick of the University of Illinois, encompassed the broadest approach to the main problem of the status of English studies today. Professor Herrick pointed to the admitted collapse of classical studies in our time, and suggested that it is all too probable that English will follow the same path unless something is done soon. He felt that the greatest single cause of trouble at present was the poor quality of students who were planning to teach English. The better graduate students of today are not to be found in Departments of English. Unless we can attract them to our profession we will soon follow our classical cousins into mourned obscurity.

Frankly admitting that he did not know the answer to the chilling problem he had posed, Professor Herrick expressed the hope that we too may find a new and saving approach to literature, even as Robortelli in the sixteenth century rescued the study of literature from the grammarians by the introduction of esthetics. Nothing will be gained by complaining about the scientists. We must experiment with different approaches, and we must strive to induce better people to enter the profession. Otherwise we may as well admit defeat.

The scholarly side of the program was ably handled by Professor Sarah T. Sission of Butler University, who presented an interesting paper entitled "Wordsworth's Denial of the Picturesque: an Interpretation."

Philip B. Daghlian
Horst Frenz
Indiana University

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THEY'RE GREAT GUYS

In these days of looking ahead, somewhat or altogether apprehensively, it may be well to pose a question of particular moment to teachers of English.

The decline of the British Empire has been ruefully admitted by its own government. Its actual fall may consume as much time as did that of Rome; and both together may similarly need to await their Gibbon for a millenium or two. But the consequences are already beginning to make themselves felt, and there are consequences for us English teachers too.

It is not impossible that the consequences will resemble those that followed Rome's absorption of the Greek lands. That meant, as history worked itself out, that Hellenic material might practically vanished, but that on the other hand Rome became the medium for proliferating civilization with Hellenic ideas. The Greek schoolmaster was abroad in the land, and the techniques of Greek oratory, Greek metrics, Greek philosophy, and Greek plots for comedies complacently took the place of whatever full native achievement in these realms Rome might have attained.

But all of this followed Rome's conquest of Greece, when the victor subtly fell victim to the vanquished—a condition that occurs frequently enough, possibly again today with the collapse of Germany. Our relationship to England, despite lend-lease and American movies, is not quite like that. Still, as Hercules-Truman readjusts his shoulder pads while taking over the burden of the world from Atlas-Atlee, the fardel that he bears may turn out to be Anglo-Saxonism. So harsh cries of "Imperialism!" from the Muscovite quarter would seem to indicate.

Yet whatever creed of Anglo-Saxonism may hereafter be preached, it will be rather heavily weighted, one suspects, with anti-British elements, for reasons both historical and psychological. It is at any rate safe to prophesy that our cultural heritage is certain to be subjected to re-examination and re-appraisal. This will take varying directions and have varying effects.

1. Unquestionably the battle between the traditional elements in English departments and the American sections will be joined more fiercely than ever. Clouds of nostalgia, rolling over the landscape, will dim the issue at times; much literary blood will be shed, amid sulphurous hail and thunder winged with red lightning and impetuous rage, as the war goes on between the forces of good and evil—take your choice as to which is which. Also your choice as to the outcome.

2. While the battle is raging, new evaluations will continue to be made. British writers naturally more akin to our ways of thinking will receive greater consideration —Chaucer as against Spenser, let us say, a preference already established. British writers for whom an approximate equivalent can be found in American literature will give place in our programs to the latter. There will be a re-scaling of the whole map of literature written in English, with a marked tendency to reduce the area that British literature occupies on the map—especially if world humanities must be more and more allowed for. Possibly there will be a sharper geographical differentiation inside British literature—more specific consideration of Scottish, Irish, Welsh contributions. Certainly more attention will be given to Canadian, Australian, and South African writers.

3. On the positive side, there will of course be increasing emphasis on whatever may be regarded as typically American developments and aspects; for example, pioneer and immigrant writers, humor, the American language, the newer forms of communication, novel genres. There may even be an urge to find a new name for the teaching of English, now already found somewhat awkward and insufficient. Language Arts, with its smack of pedagogical smugness, won't do; and Communication doesn't quite tell the story.

All of this, even to those of us to whom it seems inevitable, seems a sad development, but movements of the current in the directions indicated have been evident for some time, even before World War II and Winston Churchill's too defiant assertion that he wasn't going to give any of the British Empire away. Perhaps the wiser Anglophiles, convinced of the need for concessions, will make it a strategic point always to tie English and American literature in together, and we shall read of doctoral theses in which the trisyllabic Latin derivatives in Addison's papers in **The Spectator** will be counted alongside those of Irving in **The Sketch Book.**

I noted with interest, however, the article on "New Developments at Yale" by Professor Maynard Mack and Louis Martz in the January News Letter. It seems to me a fine program, but there is in it no contaminating touch of American literature (one finds a mention of T. S. Eliot, to be sure, but he is renunciatory and centrifugal) until one reaches the final paragraph with its quotation of student comments. Then there blows in upon one the fresh earthiness of American slang. I wondered a little, nevertheless, why students subjected as Mack and Martz carefully explain, to "Problems in Writing and Reading" should talk like that, since "modern journalistic prose is avoided; the prose examined is taken predominantly from such writers as Bacon, Milton, Swift, Johnson, and Arnold, along with a few later writers of established excellence." But perhaps when these students say, "Say, this Old Testament really makes you stop to think what you believe" and "This guy Sophocles hits me where I live," it is evidence that among the later writers are included Ben Franklin, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, E. W. Howe, George Ade, and F. P. Dunne. They're great guys.

Max J. Herzberg
New York University

Plain Talk

Waste of Time

Although I had read and heard much praise of **The Art of Plain Talk** by Rudolf Flesch, Ph.D., I avoided it because it sounded like just another plan for simplicity in writing; and simplification, I thought, was no part of my problems. But in the CEA **News Letter** for January, 1947, Helen Hull so urgently recommended the book to teachers of college composition that I decided I had better read it as soon as I got time. I spent a whole day of the Spring vacation on it, and I regret the wasted time. In simplifying his doctoral dissertation, **Marks of Readable Style,** so that eighth-graders may be able to read it, Flesch has merely rehashed some things I already knew (but did not get a Ph.D. for) and has confused them so that I can no longer use them.

The book is written for teachers and for persons of four other writing professions; it proposes to show them how they can adapt their style to the understanding of the audience for which they write and sets up a scale on which they can measure their success. The difficulty of a style is computed by applying four mathematical constants to three criteria: average length of sentences, proportion of affixes, and proportion of personal references. The capacities of the audience are determined by the number of school years completed. Here is the way Dr. Flesch's scale of difficulty would regulate my style: since my students are high-school graduates, if I write something for them I may use what Flesch calls the academic style; that is, my sentences may average twenty-five words in length, I should beware of using more than forty-six affixes per 100 words (there are three affixes in **English**

(Continued from page 7)

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instructor), and I should make at least three personal references in every 100 words. These things I learn from the convenient table on p. 205, and on p. 136 I learn that this same style, which Dr. Flesch's scale recommends for writing to college freshmen, is the style used in "academic journals and quarterlies." In other words, it is just the style I want, just the style I had when I left graduate school. I did not need Dr. Flesch to tell me how to write it.

Of course, Dr. Flesch suggests (on p. 136) that, just to be sure my college freshmen understand me, I really ought "to go about one notch down the scale" to the level of the "literary and quality magazines," e.g., **Harper's** and the **Atlantic.** Well, I knew I would have to stoop a little to gather all my flock, and I am quite willing to descend to the level of **Harper's** to improve my teaching. I did not need Dr. Flesch's warning that although high-school graduates can read **The Virginia Quarterly,** "they prefer reading matter where they don't even feel any effort in reading," the **Atlantic,** for instance.

But on p. 137 Dr. Flesch warns me (as if I did not know) that if I lecture to my freshmen, I had better descend another notch on the scale to "prose of STANDARD difficulty"; that is, I should talk like the speakers on the radio program "Invitation to Learning." Obviously, I have never been even tempted to be too highbrow in my speech. So why did Miss Hull urge me to read this book?

Perhaps she thought that Dr. Flesch's magic formula would provide a formula by which I could grade themes. The book was not written for students, according to the preface, and when Dr. Flesch said (p. 188). "More often than not nowadays, writing is done on assignment, and usually the most important part of the assignment is to make information readable for the people it is meant for," he was obviously referring to the writing assignments of editors and such. But perhaps the principle ought to be applied to college assignments. For whom, then, are freshman themes meant? Not for me, surely; and just as surely not for the fourth-graders who are the audience for the easiest prose on the scale, nor even for the eighth-graders who are the audience for Dr. Flesch's "STANDARD prose." If freshman themes are meant for anybody, they are meant for high-school graduates. Therefore, I should expect my freshmen to write prose as readable as that in **Harper's** or the **Atlantic,** or even that in **The American Scholar** or **The Virginia Quarterly.** Now there is something that I really did not know, but my students, who already think I expect too much of them, will not thank Dr. Flesch for telling me that; in fact, they emphatically assert that he is talking through his hat.

For once, they are right. Dr. Flesch tried to forestall criticism in his preface by casting one of his ever-ready sneers at persons who "with a passion for accuracy, will wallow in the little rules and computations but lose sight of the principles of plain English." So I cannot point to each of the innumerable false assumptions, guesses, and contradictions which riddle the whole book, but must content myself with showing that that principles of plain English which Dr. Flesch propounds are the stock subject-matter in the conventional courses in composition that Flesch contemns; that the Flesch formula betrays a passion for inaccuracy, a delight in little rules and computations, and a flagrant disregard for the very principles of plain English that it is supposed to measure; and that the scale which is intended to show who can understand what is based on an unjustified inference begot by ignorance on a sheer guess.

In his preface Flesch admits that, except for the formula, "The other features of the book are not particularly novel, but may seem novel to people who have been trained in conventional rhetoric and composition." Except for Flesch's sneers at grammarians, his extreme distaste for connectives, and his insistence that an indefinite pronoun can be both singular and plural at the same time, the only thing that my students (now being trained in conventional composition) would consider novel about Flesch's chapters VIII to XIV (one third of the book) would be the style: Flesch writes for the understanding of eighth-graders, but our grammar is written for high-school students. The principles are the same: use more verbs and fewer adjectives, don't overcrowd a sentence, avoid wordiness and florid rhetoric, follow the best contemporary usage and style.

The formula for determining how difficult a piece of writing is uses three criteria. With regard to the first, Dr. Flesch not only admits but demonstrates (on pp. 21-22 and 32-33) that the construction, not the number of words is the factor that makes a long sentence difficult; yet the formula ignores structure, considers only length. With regard to the second, in beginning his discussion of simplicity in choice of words, he quotes from **The King's English** by Fowler and from a lecture by Quiller-Couch and says, "There is, in a nutshell, the best advice you can get anywhere." I got it long ago and have been passing it on to my students, but the formula ignores it except to the slight extent that the difficulty of a word is determined by its affixes. On p. 45 Flesch admits that the number of affixes is not the factor that makes words hard to understand, that some affixes are easy, and that simplification requires the elimination of hard words, not merely the elimination of affixes; yet his formula is concerned only with the number of affixes, be they hard or easy, and **heterogeneous and hemisphere, cisatlantic** and **cooperate, vivacity** and **liveliness** add equally to the score of difficulty. In defending his third criterion, Flesch ignores the fact that personal references add to readibility only if they are easy and familiar: all names are counted whether they are Tom and Mary or Swedenborg and Plotinus; all personal pronouns count whether they refer to the reader himself or to an abstraction like Man.

Dr. Flesch did well to admit in his preface that his formula provides "only a rough estimate," not to be taken "too seriously," for it measures only very indirectly three causes of difficulty and utterly ignores the most important of all. How seriously the formula ought to be taken is apparent when it is applied to a style of known difficulty. It gives Emerson's style in "The American Scholar" a score of 2.8, or "FAIRLY EASY"—easier than Flesch's style in this book, or between that of a story in **Collier's** and that of an article in **Cosmopolitan.**

This rough estimate is then applied, in ignorance of actual reading ability, to the guess that ability to read with understanding is a correlative of the time spent in school: "So, if you test a piece of writing and come out with a score of say, 3-4 (STANDARD), you can translate this into school grades and say, This is easy to understand for children in eighth or ninth grade." (p. 134) Therefore, "The American Scholar" is easy to understand for children in seventh grade, in spite of the fact that it is not readable to college freshmen.

Dr. Flesch gleefully exposes his own fundamental error in his word-counting predecessors, but

(Continued on page 8)

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he will not try the shoe on his own foot. He has studied and he cites the statistical proofs that students, not only can, but willingly do read far beyond their statistical abilities if they are interested in the content and that they cannot understand what ought to be easy for them if they are not interested in the content. Every one of Flesch's little rules and computations can be deliberately reversed without producing unreadable prose, provided only that the content be within the reader's actual or imaginative experience and be engrossing.

In other words, Dr. Flesch's doubly rewarded research has not taught him that readability and comprehensibility are not the same thing, that writing must be readable before it can be understood, and that the one indispensable factor in readability is content that is worth reading about in the reader's estimation.

But even if the word-counters should learn that, they would be of no help to us instructors in composition because it does not follow that a person can write readably about anything he is interested in. Other theorizers have already jumped to that conclusion.

Louis C. Schaedler
Wayne University

Deliberate Misrepresentation

(Upon receipt of Mr. Schaedler's attack, the editor asked Mr. Flesch if he wished to comment. He did, and his reply follows.)

Mr. Schaedler's attack on my book combines several familiar techniques: setting up strawmen to knock them down, quotation out of context, deliberate misinterpretation, and simple name-calling. I shall deal with each in turn.

Strawman No. 1: Mr. Schaedler starts with the assumption that I want teachers to apply my formula to their lectures or to their students' themes. Of course, there is no such ridiculous recommendation in my book. What I had hoped for was that teachers would find the book of professional interest and possibly use it as a supplementary text; and I am happy to know that many of them did just that.

Strawman No. 2: Mr. Schaedler finds fault with the fact that the book didn't tell him anything he didn't know; at the same time he disparages the simplicity with which the material is presented. But the popularization of modern principles of rhetoric and composition is the whole point of the book. Naturally, its subject matter is familiar to an English teacher; if it were not, he could hardly qualify for his job. That doesn't mean, however, that there is no place for such a book. All my adult students tell me that its principles are novel to them and that they were taught different and even contrary principles when they took freshman English in college. Doubtless this situation will improve to the degree as freshman composition courses are entrusted to progressive young instructors like Mr. Schaedler. (I don't mean this as a facetious remark.) But until then, the book seems to fill a need.

Quotation out of context: Mr. Schaedler accuses me of ignorance because I put too much faith in the correlation between reading ability and education. As evidence, he quotes a sentence from page 134. He does **not** quote, however, the following significant sentence from the very next paragraph: "This does not mean that a person's understanding of reading matter depends solely on the time he spent in school . . . "

Deliberate misinterpretation: Mr. Schaedler's main argument runs like this: (1) The formula is based on familiar principles and therefore unnecessary; (2) it doesn't apply to everything and is therefore useless; (3) it doesn't measure the cause of readability and is therefore nonsense. These arguments, though mutually exclusive, have been used against every novel scientific measurement technique; all are based on deliberate misinterpretation of the scientific method. Doubtless, when doctors began to measure body temperature by a thermometer, their learned colleagues objected because (1) you don't need a thermometer to tell whether a patient has a fever; (2) there are many people whose normal temperature is not "normal"; (3) the thermometer measures only a symptom—the fever—but doesn't tell anything about the patient's diseases. Similarly, Mr. Schaedler says that the measurement of difficulty is pointless; that a single test of Emerson's "American Scholar" disproves the norms set on the basis of thousands of cases; and that the formula is wrong because it cannot foretell whether the text will be "worth reading about in the reader's estimation." But to replace subjective guesswork by objective tests is the raison d'etre for all measurement; to take account of many variables is the basis of all statistical norms; and to deal with tangible effects rather than intangible causes is the fundamental principle of modern science. Of course I know that structure rather than length makes sentences difficult; that abstractness rather than complexity determines the difficulty of words; and that not all names and personal pronouns are equally easy to read. In fact, I constructed my formula only after I had tested and weighed all these and many other factors; and I settled on my three-factor formula for much the same reasons that led to measuring temperature by measuring the expansion of a column of mercury. I found it the most practical measure of the tangible aspects of comprehensibility; but I have never said that it measures the basic causes of readability. If Mr. Schaedler had picked his quotations a little more fairly, he might have quoted me as saying that "to be understood by a schoolboy, you have to use plain talk, to be sure; but you also have to use imagination to dress up what you say, or the schoolboy won't listen." And if he had glanced at my dissertation before attacking the scientific reasoning behind my formula, he would have found the emphatic assertion that "what makes reading hard is not the words but what is said between them."

But Mr. Schaedler deliberately misinterprets my modest testing tools as a magic formula to produce readable prose—and then dismisses it because it doesn't come up to expectations. He even uses the phrase "magic formula" in spite of the fact that I already answered such criticism in the preface to my book with these words: "Some readers, I am afraid, will expect a magic formula for good writing and will be disappointed with my simple yardstick."

Simple name-calling (like "passion for inaccuracy," "ever-ready sneers," "ignorance") requires no answer, of course. I readily admit that these deviations from customary academic style add readability to Mr. Schaedler's remarks, but I don't feel that they are really an improvement. What puzzles me, though, are the implications of his reference to my "doubly rewarded research." Apparently he considers it reprehensible to write a popular book about something Columbia University has accepted as a contribution to knowledge.

Rudolf Flesch
Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

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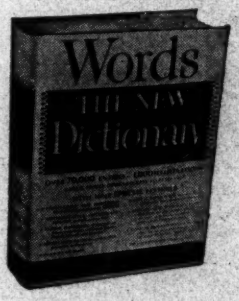

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